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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an exploratory factor analysis of the Spiritual Well-Being (SWB) Scale, which was developed to examine overall life satisfaction. It is a 20-item, self-report instrument that measures three dimensions: an overall Spiritual Well-Being score, a Religious Well-Being score, and an Existential Well-Being score. The findings show that gender shapes responses to the SWB Scale. In the analysis, a four-factor model emerged for women while a three-factor model emerged for men. Counselors and researchers working with this scale need to be aware of these differences especially with regard to the Existential Well-Being Scale. (GCP)

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Running head: Gender Differences

Spiritual Well-Being Scale Differences between Caucasian Males and Females

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Statement of the Problem

The SWB Scale was developed to examine overall life satisfaction (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1979). It is a 20-item, self-report instrument that measures three dimensions: an overall Spiritual Well-Being score (SWB, 20 items), a Religious Well-Being score (RWB, 10 items), and an Existential Well-Being score (EWB, 10 items). Items are rated on a 6-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with half of the items reversed in wording to reduce response bias.

The SWB has been used to study a variety of groups (Bufford, Paloutzian, & Ellison, 1991) and has shown test-retest reliaibilites of 4, 6, and 10 week intervals ranging from .73-.99 for the scales (Bufford, Paloutzian, & Ellison, 1991). In terms of validity, Ellison (1983) demonstrated through factor analysis that all items loaded on three factors: RWB on factor one and EWB on sub-factors two and three (life direction and life satisfaction).

Hall, Tisdale, and Brokaw (1994) recommended that the factor structure of the scale be clarified. No research has been done with regard to the impact of gender on the scale. In this study, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the validity of the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWB) with regard to gender differences. Because previous research (Miller, Fleming, & Brown-Anderson, 1998) found an impact of ethnicity with regard to the scale, ethnicity was controlled for in this study by only examining Caucasians.

Procedure

In this study, exploratory factor analysis was conducted. The sample was made up of 98 Caucasian males and 127 Caucasian females who were undergraduate students in a Southeastern United States university. Subjects took the SWB Scale as a part of their university classes. The

mean age was 21.74 with a standard deviation of 5.18.

Results

Because no research has been done on the impact of gender on the SWB Scale, exploratory factor analysis was used to examine scale factors according to gender. A four-factor model (Religious Well-Being, Future, Meaning/purpose, Life Satisfaction) emerged for women rather than the original two-factor structure (Religious Well-Being, Existential Well-Being) as proposed by the scale's authors (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982). For women, four factors emerged with eigenvalues of greater than or equal to one that accounted for 67% of the variance. All of the Religious Well-Being Scale items loaded on one factor, but the Existential Well-Being items loaded on three factors. The three EWB factors were: Future, Meaning/purpose, Life Satisfaction).

A three-factor model (Religious Well-Being, Meaning/purpose, Life Satisfaction) emerged for men rather than the original two-factor structure (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982). For men, three factors emerged with eigenvalues greater than or equal to one that accounted for 60% of the variance. All but one of the Religious Well-Being Scale items loaded on one factor. The one RWB item that loaded with the EWB items was "I have a personally meaningful relationship with God." This item loaded with one of the two EWB factors, Meaning/purpose. The other EWB factor was Life Satisfaction.

Conclusions

The findings show that gender shapes responses to the SWB Scale. In the exploratory factor analysis, a four-factor model emerged for women while a three-factor model emerged for men. Counselors and researchers working with this scale need to be aware of these differences

especially with regard to the Existential Well-Being Scale.

In terms of the Existential Well-Being Scale, women appear to distinguish a futuristic perspective from Meaning/purpose and Life Satisfaction while this aspect of the future is fused with Meaning/purpose and Life Satisfaction for men. Women, then, may separate existential well-being into a time frame of present and future while men may make no distinction with regard to the future as it relates to the meaning/purpose and life satisfaction of their lives. For men, the future focus may be imbedded in the fabric of their life's meaning/purpose and satisfaction. The critical aspect of meaning/purpose for males in terms of their existential well-being may be supported by the RWB item included with the EWB factors for males that included a meaningful relationship with God.

Further research needs to be done with regard to gender to clarify its impact on the SWB Scale. Factors such as age, because of the possible study limitation of the young age of the sample, need to be considered in their interaction with gender in future research also.

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